



HELPING TEENS/NEW DRIVERS LEARN TO DRIVE

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If you are trying to teach someone else how to drive, **the most important thing you can do is to drive safely yourself.** Though it sounds trite, it is true. Your friend or family member is now watching more carefully than you can ever dream. How do we know? Examiners quite often hear, “Well, that’s how my dad/mom does it.” Sometimes the young driver is saying this to defend such things as “rolling stops”. Luckily, it is also often said with pride, when the applicant is giving a parent credit for their safe driving habits.

Getting a driver license is often referred to as the modern equivalent of a rite of passage to adulthood for the young, new driver – and it’s certainly a dangerous one. The driving world they enter is far too intense to tackle without serious preparation.

As a parent (or concerned mentor for a friend) you are the one who cares most about your teenager’s driving ability and safety. This chapter will help give you some hints and ideas on ways to participate in the process of educating your teenager (or inexperienced adult) behind the wheel.

Which Comes First, the Book or the Road?

You both will find it helpful to review this handbook, and any other materials you can find before actually letting the new driver get behind the wheel. People under the age of eighteen (18) must have a learner permit for 180 days and qualify under the GDL program before they can be road tested. (See Chapter 3 for full details.) This requirement involves “book learning” before getting on the road and a minimum amount of “supervised on the road learning” before getting a license to drive solo. This is a good principle for people of any age who are just learning to drive.

A SAFE Attitude for Driving and Learning

Attitude determines how the knowledge and skills your teen or new driver learns will be used. It determines whether a driver will be cooperative or competitive in traffic, whether he or she will accept a high level of risk or put into practice the concepts of defensive driving taught by their instructor and covered in Chapter 13 of this manual.

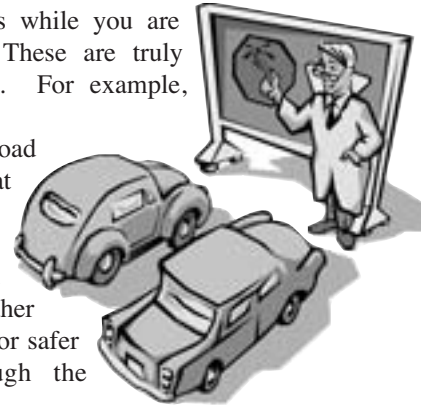
As we mentioned above your biggest contribution to your new driver’s safety and effectiveness behind the wheel will be your example. Patience, courtesy, and a willingness to improve will be your best assets. Now is the time to review your own driving habits and offer your teen or new driver the example of courtesy and consideration for other road users. This may do more than anything else to ensure your teen’s driving safety.

Verbal Teaching in the “Moving Classroom”

A second helpful thing you can do is to talk out loud while you are driving. Rather than overload the new driver with information and advice while he or she is also trying to simply learn the mechanics of driving, take advantage of

teaching opportunities while you are behind the wheel. These are truly “teachable moments”. For example, you can:

- Point out tricky road signs, and ask what they mean.
- When a light turns yellow, talk about how you knew whether it was safe to stop, or safer to continue through the intersection.
- Ask the teen/new driver questions about the traffic behind you or beside you – make them aware that you have to pay attention to traffic all around you, not just in front of you.
- Practice the “two-second” rule by explaining out loud the steps you are taking to gauge your following distance.



Once you start doing this, you will be surprised at all of the wisdom you already have. You may also be surprised when it opens the door for your pupil to offer friendly and constructive criticism of your own driving habits! Since most of us have room for improvement, you will, hopefully, be able to accept with humor any good criticism they have.

Planning Safe and Informative Practice Sessions

It’s important to plan practice sessions. Always decide where to go and what you are going to do before setting out. Random driving around during practice sessions can be dangerous. It is all too easy for the novice driver to get into trouble particularly in the early stages. Before venturing into traffic for practice driving be sure that your teen / new driver has good coordination with hands and feet. Until the novice is sure of the pedals, the danger of hitting the wrong pedal in a panic situation is always present.

Nothing substitutes for actual experience on the road. However you will want to have your first lessons concentrate on simply gaining control of the vehicle. Later lessons can build on this, getting increasingly more challenging. Listed below is some ideas for one approach you might choose to follow:

Phase One: Have the new driver practice controlling the car itself. Find someplace safe and away from traffic. A large deserted parking lot is ideal for these initial sessions because it allows the beginner to concentrate fully on the feel of the controls and the response of the car. Start by practicing these basic skills:

- Buckling up, adjusting the seat and mirrors so that all necessary controls are within easy reach.
- Operating the gearshift (and clutch if manual transmission), gas and brake pedals.
- Backing and pulling the car forward.

- Right and Left turns while driving in the parking lot.
- Staying within an imaginary lane.

Phase Two: Take the driver to a quiet residential area and let your new driver practice not only the above skills, but also add:

- Pulling into traffic and navigating simple intersections
- Keeping proper lane position and allowing safe (2-second) following distances.
- Easy lane changes.

Phase Three: After you are satisfied that the basic controls are fairly well mastered, you are now ready to take the new driver into heavier traffic. Again, you will practice all of the above, and add:

- Parallel parking and up / down hill parking
- Navigating multiple turn lane intersections
- U-turns and quick stops (simulating emergency)

Phase Four: When you have confidence the new driver can handle greater challenges, you should guide him or her to practice all the above in the following conditions:

- On high-speed multi-lane highways or interstates
- In various weather conditions
- At night in good weather and bad weather
- City driving or heavy traffic areas

Additional hints to help you as a teacher / mentor:

Stay Alert.: Anticipate problems and always be ready to react to help avoid accidents or other unsafe situations.

Communicate Clearly: Give directions well in advance and try to always use the same terms (don't say accelerator one time and gas pedal the next, for example).

Don't hit the beginner with everything at once: rather than taking the new driver to a multi-lane intersection for their first left turn do this in a calmer traffic area. Remember even a simple right turn involves several steps (checking mirrors, signaling, braking, lane use, braking, turning, etc.) To expect a beginner to follow all of these correctly during the early sessions is asking too much.

Don't get excited during practice sessions: calmly respond to errors as needed. Don't "yell and fuss" over every mistake. This can quickly erode the new driver's confidence and make performance difficult.

Don't overload or distract: Remember everything you say is also a distraction for the drive. Be sparing in your comments and, above all, try to avoid letting the beginner get into situation he or she isn't ready to handle.

Stop and Discuss: Stop as soon as you can, while a major mistake is still fresh in the new driver's memory. Then take time to discuss what happened and what the safest response should be.

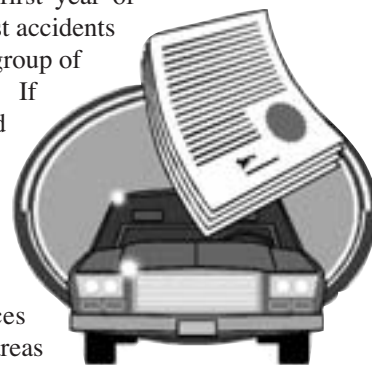
Two Reference Tools to Consider

Driving Log: Safety researchers have found that the more supervised miles new drivers have before driving on their own, the fewer accidents they have. This seems like common sense, but is there a magic number of miles you should ride with your student? The University of Michigan's

Transportation Research Institute recommends 3,000 miles.

Each new driver is different, of course, and yours may not need that many miles to be a confident, competent driver. Tennessee's GDL program requires a specific number of hours (50) be driven by minors prior to being eligible to move up to the Intermediate license level. To keep track of these hours we suggest either getting a simple spiral ring notebook to keep in the glove compartment to record your practice sessions – or – you may choose to make copies of the sample log on the next page.

Driving Contracts: The first year of driving is a high-risk period for the beginner. Inexperience combined with a lack of skill means that one in five male 16-year old drivers and about one in ten female 16-year olds will have an accident during their first year of driving. Some of the worst accidents occur at night and with a group of young people in the car. If alcohol or any other kind of impairment is involved the risk in this situation is magnified several times. This is one of the reasons that Tennessee's GDL program places restrictions on these two areas for new teen drivers.



As it gets closer to the time when your new driver will be applying for the Intermediate Driver License, some parents find it helpful to sit down and spell out just what they expect when they turn the car over to their teen. It is up to you whether you would want to have this "contract" written and signed, or just discussed as a family, but areas you could consider covering in your agreement include:

- ✓ Where they may drive (miles, road types, etc.)
- ✓ What hours of the day they may drive
- ✓ The condition the car should be returned (gas in tank, clean, etc.) and the consequences if this is neglected.
- ✓ Who pays for the car's gas and maintenance
- ✓ What amount they will contribute toward auto insurance
- ✓ Responsibility for parking tickets or vehicle damage
- ✓ Consequences for moving violations, including speeding

Safe driving is very much a matter of seeing what needs to be seen and making good decisions, but this is not simple to achieve. Experience and training play a major role in ensuring that a driver's eyes will look in the right places at the right time and that their knowledge of safe and defensive driving will help them make the proper response to the situation.

Being a good defensive driver means more than just being cautious; and mere experience isn't enough either! The good defensive driver has to work at developing good driving techniques. And this work does not end with passing the driver license examination. The novice driver's biggest enemy is the complacency that comes from early success at

learning driving basics. As parents or mentors your role is to help the teen overcome that complacency and continue to build driving skills after licensing.

Helping Non-English Speaking Beginners

If you have shouldered the task of teaching someone whose first language is not English, two areas in particular deserve special attention. First, make every effort to ensure that the driver studies the material on traffic signs and signals thoroughly, and help him or her to “translate” these while you are out driving together. Second, put yourself in the role of an examiner, and let the driver practice following simple instructions in English (for example: “Turn left”; “Slow down”; “Go straight at the next intersection”; etc.). All applicants must understand and speak enough English to safely communicate with the examiner before a road test can be administered.

A Special Final Word to Parents

Remember – a driver license examiner spends less than 30 minutes driving with your child. Just by virtue of the fact that it is an examination, this is a special trip. Most applicants will perform at their very best level during the examination. Just because they perform at the passing level then does not necessarily mean they will always use those safe driving procedures after the examiner is no longer in the car.

The examiner can evaluate a driver’s competence, but the responsibility of education and teaching that child to drive rests with the parents. This means that it is wise to continue to monitor your teen’s driving performance even after they have been issued a driver license.

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